From 1905 to 1980, the Macmillan Company of Canada was a crucial catalyst in the shaping of Canada's literary heritage. Macmillan championed a group of leading Canadian authors including Stephen Leacock, Mazo de la Roche, Grey Owl, Hugh MacLennan, Adele Wiseman, and many others. The company also launched some of Canada’s enduring classics, such as Frederick Philip Grove’s *In Search of Myself* (1946), W.O. Mitchell’s *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947), and Ethel Wilson’s *Swamp Angel* (1954).

Ellen Elliott was secretary and director of Macmillan between 1937 and 1947 and helped manage the flagship Canadian book publisher during the difficult years of the Second World War. During the war years, Elliott worked under president Robert Huckvale, a skilled accountant. Huckvale, however, was not a strong leader, and Elliott functioned as “head of the publishing side of the business.” At a time when local publishers struggled with inadequate resources, economic instability, and national unrest, Elliott worked tirelessly to sustain the company and build its roster of writers. Among the first women to hold a senior position in Canadian publishing, she helped consolidate the growth of Macmillan from a branch-plant operation

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1 Ruth Panofsky is Associate Professor of English at Ryerson University, Toronto. Her most recent book is a publishing history of Canadian writer Adele Wiseman, *The Force of Vocation: The Literary Career of Adele Wiseman* (Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 2006). She thanks June Liu and Melissa Sky for research assistance, Robert Brandeis and Lisa Sherlock of Victoria University Libraries for locating and reproducing the image that accompanies this essay, and Dr. Janet Friskney, Roy MacSkimming, Maria Meindl, and Dr. Carl Spadoni for their invaluable advice. She is especially indebted to Walter J. Meyer zu Erpen, President of the Survival Research Institute of Canada, for his generous assistance. In addition, she appreciates the valuable suggestions toward revision offered by the anonymous vettors of this essay for the *Papers*. Preparation of this essay was assisted by funding from the Bibliographical Society of America, the Bibliographical Society of Canada, and SSHRC.

to a mature publishing house and worked closely with writers Irene Baird, Audrey Alexandra Brown, Mona Gould, Frederick Philip Grove, W.O. Mitchell, P.K. Page, and E.J. Pratt, for example. After the war, in 1946, John Morgan Gray was appointed general manager and the following year Elliott was forced to leave her position.

An abundance of archival documents in Canada, Britain, and the United States has survived providing crucial insight into Macmillan’s role in Canada’s publishing history. Yet despite the company’s importance as a Canadian cultural institution, and despite the abundant archival material, its history remains to be written. This essay is the first to study Elliott’s significant role as company secretary and director throughout the Second World War and her dedicated work as an editor who saw “the potentialities within Canada to build a literature” that would reflect the nation’s geographical and cultural diversity.

Ellen Elliott was born in England in 1901 and educated at Hampshire's Barton Peveril College, where she completed her studies in English. For a brief period following graduation, she taught in Hampshire and Portsmouth. In 1920, she immigrated with her 47-year-old mother and joined the Macmillan Company of Canada in March of that year; as Elliott once explained, “it was the only job the employment agency had to offer.”For five years, she held “a junior position” in Macmillan’s education department. In 1925, she was appointed private secretary to president Hugh Eayrs, and in 1937 was promoted to secretary of the company. In 1940, when Eayrs died suddenly of a heart attack, Robert Huckvale was appointed president and charged with managing Macmillan’s finances, while Elliott was appointed head of publishing. Two years later, she was elected to the board of directors, with one share in the company. With over twenty years of service, the directors of the parent company in London – Daniel Macmillan and Horatio (Rache) Lovat Dickson, in particular – recognized Elliott for her dedication to Macmillan and deep knowledge of the publishing industry in Canada.

As a young married woman, Elliott did not relinquish her own surname; rather, she preferred the hyphenated form of Elliott-Booth. When her first marriage failed, Elliott sought a divorce from her husband – at a time when divorce was socially unacceptable – and

5 “Portrait” 32.
lived for a period with her mother. Later, she cohabited with former colleague and veteran George Milton McKanday (who had worked at Macmillan from 1929 to 1931) until his estranged first wife, Doris, died in January 1955 and they were free to marry (on 1 October 1960). McKanday had two daughters, Catherine and Amy, from his first marriage.

Privately, Elliott’s interest in spiritualism, which she admitted was “very deep,” was an enduring source of personal satisfaction during her years at Macmillan. A firm “belief in the survival of the dead as spirits capable of communication with the living, usually through a medium,” brought her into regular contact with other practising spiritualists. Spiritualism had increased in popularity since the First World War, largely in response to the desperate need of bereaved families who sought solace in the possibility of survival after death, and was endorsed by luminaries such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle whose books *The New Revelation* (1918) and *The Vital Message* (1919) lauded the movement. In Canada, spiritualism attracted a number of prominent practitioners, including literary journalist William Arthur Deacon and his wife Sally, poet E.J. Pratt and his wife Viola (fig.1), and prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. Mackenzie King became a friend and confidante of Elliott; he believed there was “no humbug or fraud about Miss Elliott ... a woman of wide business experience, very alert and active.”

Elliott regularly attended séances and held sittings at her home. She claimed to have been visited a number of times by the spirit of Hugh Eayrs, for example, and on one memorable occasion, with Mackenzie King in attendance – in whose view “nothing in the world ... [was] truer than the survival of human personality” – she was visited by the spirits of Queen Victoria, Florence Nightingale, Anne Boleyn, and Sir Frederic Banting. If today spiritualism invokes cynicism, it is useful to recall its former popularity and to understand that Elliott was no dilettante. In fact, she was a devout practitioner whose beliefs were

9 King, 16 Dec. 1941.
10 Pitt 49.
endorsed by physicians, including Thomas Glendenning Hamilton, whose book on psychic phenomena, *Intention and Survival*, was issued by Elliott for Macmillan Canada in 1942. Archival evidence shows that Elliott’s private belief in spiritualism had little influence on her work as a publisher – except to encourage Macmillan’s publication of Dr. Hamilton’s book, the cost of which was covered entirely by benefactor Julian Gifford Cross.

In *The Perilous Trade*, his survey of English-language publishing houses of the twentieth century, Roy MacSkimming describes Ellen Elliott as “the first woman ... to hold such a senior position in Canadian publishing without owing it to a husband’s influence.”11 Until the 1950s, in fact, most women in the publishing industry occupied junior positions. There were rare exceptions, however. Between 1932 and 1945,

Alison Ewart was general editor of the University of Toronto Press's publishing program. During the war years, Gladys Neale, who worked alongside Elliott at Macmillan, was acting manager of the education department, and by 1950 she had been appointed manager of the department. Neither Ewart nor Neale, however, ever advanced to the senior position of director eventually held by Elliott at Macmillan. Ewart resigned for family reasons and Neale remained head of a single department in a much-expanded company. In fact, as MacSkimming suggests, Irene Clarke, wife of W.H. (Bill) Clarke and sister of John Irwin, who together in 1930 established the publishing firm of Clarke, Irwin, may well have been the only woman before Elliott to occupy a managerial position in Canadian publishing. In addition, in English Canada the professionalization of editing — work generally undertaken by women — did not begin in earnest until the 1950s and accounted, in part, for the rarity of women in senior publishing positions during the first half of the twentieth century.

Elliott entered the world of publishing with a confidence borne of natural intelligence, academic training, and practical experience. As a keen student of English and one-time teacher of literature, she was eminently suited to the challenges and exhilarations offered by book publishing. In her first year at Macmillan, where she worked under first president Frank Wise — in 1920, Wise's fifteen-year term as president was coming to an inauspicious end as a result of fraud and gross mismanagement of the company — her self-assurance soon became apparent. In response, for example, to Wise's exceeding rudeness, "when he got into a towering rage and used bad language," the "green nineteen-year-old girl ... told him in precisely the same language he used exactly what she thought of him."12 Elliott's straightforward manner and critical intelligence secured her a place in the education department, where she spent her first five years at Macmillan, participating in its day-to-day operations and learning the business side of publishing.

An aunt to Jack Stoddart Sr., who years later would purchase and develop General Publishing, Nell Elliott was an accomplished woman, professionally and personally. Characterized by observant "gray-blue eyes,"13 fair hair, and a self-proclaimed cheekiness, she was confident and collegial. She was known as a "practical visionary" and "true editor" who understood "what constitutes a good book..., what books ought to be written..., what patience and coaxing and

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12 Ellen Elliott to Horatio Lovat Dickson, 4 Nov. 1943, MCC fonds.
13 "Portrait" 32.
revision and constructive criticism go into the bringing of a saleable manuscript to birth.\textsuperscript{14}

Hugh Eayrs, who succeeded Wise as president in 1921, was impressed with Elliott and recognized her as a fellow "bookman." Elliott's analytical abilities and commitment – she often worked at home on evenings and weekends – led to her promotion in 1925 to Eayrs's private secretary, a relatively senior position in the company. Elliott nonetheless remained behind the scenes, working on behalf of Macmillan, its authors, and her superior in a multitude of ways, both professional and personal.

Elliott provided Eayrs invaluable professional assistance with key tasks. She frequently wrote letters on behalf of the president, and suggested potential assessors of manuscripts and reviewers of published books. More significantly, Eayrs habitually assigned Elliott the important job of reading manuscripts – hundreds per year, in fact – that were submitted to Macmillan. Her discerning mind easily distinguished between publishable and non-publishable works. She understood that a number of factors, not least economic viability, influenced an evaluation of a manuscript. Her 1938 assessment of Paul Hiebert's renowned work, \textit{Sarah Binks}, for instance, reflected her readiness to balance literary merit with commercial marketability:

\begin{quote}
The author may not regard his book as a satire or a take-off on any Canadian poet or poetry, but I most certainly do. It is a very clever thing, and follows the plan of most stodgy autobiographies on the market a few years ago. There are numerous examples from the poetess's own work which are brilliant.

This is a genuine book of humour, but whether it would go in Canada or not, I don't know. I should imagine, however, that Canadian poets would find it hard to laugh at themselves as they would undoubtedly see themselves if they read this book.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

In this case, Elliott's pragmatism outweighed her personal taste and, on the basis of her judgement, Hugh Eayrs rejected \textit{Sarah Binks}. In fact, Macmillan was the first of several publishers to whom Hiebert submitted his work of comic genius. By 1947, the year \textit{Sarah Binks} finally was published by Oxford University Press Canada, Eayrs had been dead for seven years and Elliott had recently resigned from Macmillan. No doubt, in the privacy of her Palmerston Avenue apartment she would have taken more than a passing notice of the

\textsuperscript{14} "Portrait" 33.
\textsuperscript{15} Elliott to Hugh Eayrs, 30 Aug. 1938, MCC fonds.
book's instant success and notoriety. Whether Elliott ever regretted her earlier appraisal of Hiebert's work and its loss to Macmillan will remain unknown, however.

Elliott regularly offered Eayrs personal assistance. She ran his errands, whether he was in the office, out of town on business, or on vacation. In an extraordinary display of loyalty, while Eayrs was on an extended holiday in Tadoussac, Québec, she had his fishing gear sent to him and tried unsuccessfully in several Toronto shops to purchase a canoe for his son. Elliott was troubled by Eayrs's health problems - "I am concerned to hear you are not feeling so well. The sea air will probably buck you up and in a few days you will be as right as rain"16 - and, whenever she could, sought to shield him from stress. She managed his office efficiently, consulted him only when necessary, and always "handle[d] the cranky old authors, like [conservationist] Grey Owl ... [and poet] Wilson MacDonald."17

"Don't worry about anything in the office," she wrote on 19 July 1938, assuming a characteristic pose as Eayrs's protector. Although privately she once admitted to doing his work "for years because the man was so sick," she remained Eayrs's defender and, after his death, reprimanded author Frederick Philip Grove for calling him a scoundrel in her presence: "I was furious; here I was struggling with the man's job, and after working for a man for twenty years, you sort of miss him around the place."18

To Eayrs, Elliott was a "good friend"19 whose "dry pungent humour and zest for living"20 leavened the demanding job of running a publishing company. As she once quipped on a particularly trying workday, "In certain moods I could not only write a very good murder story, but commit a juicy murder itself."21 Publicly, Eayrs and Elliott were known as "a splendid working team"22 who sought jointly to foster Macmillan's growing reputation as a publisher of important books by and for Canadians. Privately, their mutual regard was evident in a relationship founded on respect and trust.

16 Elliott to Eayrs, 19 July 1938, MCC fonds.
18 Stobie 3.
19 Eayrs to Elliott, July 1936, MCC fonds.
20 "Portrait" 33.
21 Elliott to Eayrs, 6 Jan. 1938, MCC fonds.
22 "Portrait" 32.
It was after Eayrs's death in 1940, however, when she assumed control of publishing at Daniel Macmillan's behest, that Elliott rose to the demands of her position "to do good work for the House" and made her most significant contribution to Macmillan. Like Eayrs, Elliott held the calling of publisher in high regard. She believed deeply in the cultural work performed by publishers and understood the economic asset represented by publishing companies. Elliott argued candidly that publishing

is not the racket a lot of folk imagine it to be. It is an industry which provides a reasonable livelihood for various kinds of craftsmen—authors, readers, editors, printers, proofreaders, binders, and booksellers...an economic enterprise which provides the means of present-day education and entertainment, and preserves a nation’s culture for the generations of the future.24

This view of publishing, at once idealistic in its nationalism and practical in its commercialism, guided Elliott throughout her years at the helm of Macmillan. She perceived authorship and publishing as "appalling gambles," but was undaunted by the responsibility of the publisher as cultural gatekeeper. Uncharacteristically for most publishers of her day, Elliott was open to the cultural diversity of Canada that she recognized in her frequent business travels across the country—arduous trips that required "working at night and Saturdays and Sundays too"—and welcomed the opportunity to publish the work of English, French, and immigrant writers. In 1944, her salary was raised to $5,000, half that of president Robert Huckvale, in recognition of her valuable service to the company.

Elliott’s intimate understanding of Canadian publishing practice—the industry’s reliance on educational publishing and the agency system for sustenance, for example, and the intricate links among Canadian, British, and American publishers—was evident in her astute handling of daily business matters. She also appreciated the close and enduring connections between Macmillan Canada, its parent company in London, and its affiliate house in New York. Between 1940 and 1946, she was in regular communication with Rache Lovat Dickson, the London director who was responsible for overseeing Macmillan’s Canadian company. Dickson’s Canadian

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23 Elliott to Daniel Macmillan, 3 Aug. 1942, MCC fonds.
24 Elliott 2.
25 Elliott 25.
26 Elliott to John Gray, 27 Mar. 1945, MCC fonds.
ancestry, his education at the University of Alberta under professor of literature E.K. Broadus, and his marriage to Canadian Marguerite Brodie gave him a particular interest in Macmillan Canada. He had had a friendly working relationship with Hugh Eayrs and knew John Gray, who, prior to leaving Canada for war service, had worked for eleven years in Macmillan’s education department. Dickson was kindly disposed toward Ellen Elliott, whose detailed and timely responses to his letters showed a mastery of the publishing field and dedication to her work.

That Elliott felt she could reject Dickson’s novel, Out of the West Land, shows the degree of professional confidence she had acquired by the 1940s. Moreover, that Dickson accepted her criticism of his early work – “it is much too long, particularly the earlier chapters,... [and] I noticed inaccuracies which could easily be remedied”27 – shows his regard for her editorial judgement. Dickson also valued Elliott’s knowledge of Canadian publishers. In 1944, when he asked her to describe two colleagues who were scheduled to visit England as members of the Canada Committee of the Publishers’ Association, Elliott was more than obliging. The portraits she provided of Bill Clarke (of Clarke, Irwin) and John McClelland (of McClelland and Stewart) are so vivid they are worth quoting at length. If these men visit London, she warned Dickson,

I don’t think you will find them particularly easy to entertain. Bill Clarke is a shrewd and capable young man, and a very pompous and serious one. He went all Oxford Group a few years ago and is still a straight-laced member of the United Church of Canada. He neither smokes nor drinks. Nobody holds this against him, but he is stuffy. As quite a young man he was with us for a little while, but like many another young man before him, got rather too big for his shoes. Then he and his brother-in-law (who is even stuffier) went into business for themselves as Clarke Irwin. They started very modestly, but have published some very good books, and for the last six or seven years at least they have been the Canadian agents for the Oxford University Press ...

John McClelland is a good publisher, and although quite a lot of the publishing folk here don’t like him, and find him hard to get along with, I personally have never found him difficult. I understand meetings of the Publishers’ Section of the Board of Trade are always

27 Elliott to Dickson, 21 Feb. 1944, MCC fonds.
Anticipating the need to entertain “these visiting Canadian publishers, particularly having them down to the country for the weekend,” Dickson wanted to know whose company he “should most enjoy.”

Thus, he was adequately primed to meet Bill Clarke and John McClelland, his teetotal colleagues.

As director of Macmillan, Elliott felt the privations of the war years, when details associated with printing and binding books became “a terrific pain in the neck,” and she struggled to minimize their impact on her publishing program. Given the constraints under which local publishers laboured – fewer submissions from writers; shortages of paper and binding materials and their increased cost; reduced staff; delays in production; and indifferent printers – Elliott’s marshaling of Macmillan books through the 1940s, although a reduced list, must be regarded as a success. In light of the protracted difficulties they faced, she and her fellow publishers were buoyed by “the unprecedented sales and critical reception of Canadian writers” launched during the Second World War, and were pleased that the United States was “waking up to the fact that books are written in Canada and that they are good books.”

Canadian publishing was given a further boost when the war effort prevented Britain from exporting many books. As Elliott announced in May 1943, more Canadian books were “read in the last 18 months than in ... [my] 23 years’ experience in the book business.”

Publishers and authors, in Elliott’s view, were “co-partners in a business undertaking” and success depended on their joint ability “to gauge what the public wants.” Years of experience taught her, however, that success was more often accidental than planned. Hence, she regularly discussed Macmillan’s publications in the many talks she gave to such organizations as the Women’s Art Association, the Lyceum Club, the Canadian Women’s Press Club, and the Canadian Authors Association, whose national secretary placed “unlimited

28 Elliott to Dickson, 16 Mar. 1944, MCC fonds.
29 Dickson to Elliott, 3 Mar. 1944, MCC fonds.
30 Elliott 9.
34 Elliott 23, 25.
faith”35 in Elliott’s judgement. Moreover, when literary editor William Arthur Deacon, in her view, gave Macmillan insufficient space in his book pages, she took Toronto’s Globe and Mail to task and did not renew an advertising contract for 1944.

Elliott’s approach to editing was fair and reasonable. Her own practice was first “to read a manuscript from beginning to end without making any notes so as to get the feeling of the work as a whole.”36 Generally, manuscripts were evaluated in the order in which they were received, by at least three, often by as many as six, readers. Elliott’s ability as a “talent scout”37 was considerable, however, and, when appropriate, she also solicited manuscripts from writers. Authors received responses to their submissions as expeditiously as possible, and if the editorial board decided a work was publishable, a manuscript report was prepared outlining corrections, revisions, or adaptations. Elliott sought to help writers achieve authority and style. The job of an editor, she observed, was to free writers from “restraint, get them to write easily and flowing, to dig the real, dramatic story out from behind the wall of inhibition ... to see things in perspective – to single out the incidents and characters that are likely to be of most interest and importance to the readers, and to play down those incidents and characters that are simply of local or passing significance.”38 Supportive of all authors, Elliott was especially interested in women writers who were poised to make significant contributions in several fields. Among those she encouraged were author Jessie Georgina Sime, children’s writer Olive Knox, and novelist Irene Baird.

Although Elliott minded the economic viability of Macmillan’s publishing program, the financial health of the company was tended by president Robert Huckvale, less publisher than an accountant; in 1937, Hugh Eayrs described Huckvale as Macmillan’s “staunch and devoted ‘Chancellor of the Exchequer.’”39 Elliott’s deepest concern lay with authors and their books, and she especially appreciated serious writers. Like her predecessor Hugh Eayrs, although less zealous and self-aggrandizing, she sought to discover and encourage dedicated writers who would contribute to Canada’s literary heritage and

35 Eric F. Gaskell to Ellen Elliott, 9 July 1942, MCC fonds.
36 Elliott to Lillian Hamilton, 25 Apr. 1940, MCC fonds.
37 “Portrait” 32.
38 “Portrait” 33.
enhance national identity, which had been strengthened by Canadian participation in the war.

One such author was Frederick Philip Grove, whose work Elliott championed throughout the 1940s. She found Grove demanding and arrogant but respected his “indomitable spirit” and “solid background of scholarship ... [which] came out in everything he did.” Elliott assisted the struggling author in ways both practical and intellectual. A reliable reader of manuscripts, Grove provided regular reports for Macmillan that were incisive critiques, which in turn provided Grove with extra income for his family. More importantly, Elliott’s unstinting admiration buoyed his flagging spirit and gave the author much needed encouragement to continue writing. Her view of *The Master of the Mill*, published by Macmillan in 1944, showed a balanced understanding of Grove’s realism: “he can’t depict women, there’s no doubt about that. His women are awful. But ... his dealing with social questions – unemployment, unions, strikes, industry ... that man was years ahead of his time.” Elliott was more than a “devoted publisher,” however; she was also a friend. In the final years of his life, when ill health prevented Grove from travelling, Elliott visited the author and his wife Catherine at their home in Simcoe, Ontario.

Despite the parent company’s harsh dismissal of Grove, Elliott held a steadfast appreciation for his work. London’s scathing assessment of Grove’s fictionalized autobiography, *In Search of Myself*—“‘In Search of a Publisher,’ brutally, should be this book’s subtitle in England. It is utterly dim. Reject.”—and his satire, *Consider Her Ways*—“so silly and pointless” a work that Daniel Macmillan urged the Canadian branch not to “publish any more books by this gentleman”—did not dissuade Elliott from issuing both works in 1946 and 1947, respectively. In fact, one of her “dearest hopes” was to publish “a uniform edition of the books of Frederick Philip Grove.” The uniform edition never was published, but in 1970, three years before her death, Elliott reaffirmed her enthusiasm for

40 Elliott to Frederick Philip Grove, 17 July 1944, MCC fonds.
41 Stobie, interview, 2.
42 Stobie, interview, 5.
44 Horatio Lovat Dickson to John Gray, 15 July 1946, MCC fonds.
45 Daniel Macmillan to John Gray, 27 Sept. 1946, MCC fonds.
46 Gray 344.
the author's work in an interview with Grove biographer Margaret Stobie.

Unlike her regard for Grove, Elliott's discovery of author W.O. Mitchell won her the esteem of colleagues. When she learned from Harry Clarke of Maclean's that Mitchell was working on a novel, Elliott, who had read several of Mitchell's short stories in Maclean's, lost no time in contacting the author. On 28 March 1944, she wrote to Mitchell in Alberta asking to read his completed manuscript. On the basis of Elliott's interest alone, Mitchell rejected offers from American and Canadian publishers and granted Macmillan the Canadian rights to his novel, published three years later as *Who Has Seen the Wind*. Thus began a connection between publisher and author that would endure throughout much of Mitchell's literary career.

Elliott was recognized throughout the literary and publishing communities for her discovery of Mitchell. Grove himself was engaged as reader and gave Mitchell's novel high praise: "One does not often meet with a book which combines power and beauty. Here it is ... It has the whole atmosphere of Saskatchewan which ... has never been done. Here is a talent that *must* be helped and fostered. It is to Miss Elliott's very great credit to have discovered this man."47 After reading the manuscript, Lovat Dickson wrote similarly from London to congratulate Elliott on discovering Mitchell. When *Who Has Seen the Wind* was published to wide acclaim, its success was due in part, as William Arthur Deacon acknowledged, to Elliott's championing of Mitchell's "grand novel ... that so completely portrayed a child ... [and] successfully captured the atmosphere of a small town on the Prairies."48

Elliott's success did not prevent John Gray, however, from displacing her as Mitchell's editor when, in January 1946, Gray returned to publishing after serving overseas during the war. Elliott had a warm regard for Mitchell and hoped he would "become famous."49 They enjoyed a lively correspondence and had met as well, but the author responded more sympathetically to Gray who shared several of his interests, such as fishing. Gray corresponded with Mitchell and quickly became the writer's primary contact at Macmillan. He visited Mitchell on business trips to Alberta and

47 Frederick Philip Grove, reader's report, 12 Feb. 1946, MCC fonds.
developed a personal and enduring connection with “my dear Bill.” Moreover, when Elliott wrote to Daniel Macmillan in London regarding *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Lovat Dickson intervened and responded directly to Gray, thereby preventing Elliott’s further involvement with Mitchell and his novel. As a woman, no matter how senior her position at Macmillan and despite her discovery of Mitchell, Elliott was expected to defer to Gray as the returned veteran. To do otherwise would have been out of character, both for Elliott and for the era. By the time Mitchell’s novel was published on 28 February 1947, Elliott was occupied primarily with administrative matters, such as distributing advance copies to bookstores, contacting magazine and newspaper editors, and arranging reviews. No doubt, she grasped the irony of her reduced position.

With poet Mona Gould, unlike Grove or Mitchell, Elliott could indulge her taste for poetry and for gossip. Gould was a frank woman who appreciated Elliott’s openness; she regarded her as “a most satisfactory person” who offered excellent editorial advice. In 1943, during production of her first book *Tasting the Earth*, Gould “trotted back and forth between my office and MacMillan’s [sic] like an obedient poodle ... Getting to know Ellen Elliott better all the time and liking her so much. Finding wit and humour and a salty sort of knowledge under her terrifically businesslike exterior.” Since she had moved to Owen Sound and was unable to meet her editor in Toronto, Gould’s second and final volume was edited entirely by Elliott. Elliott selected and arranged the poems included in *I Run with the Fox* (1946) and oversaw production of the book to Gould’s satisfaction. Moreover, as a working journalist, Gould encountered people in the book trade and, privately, she and Elliott became friends who exchanged gossip.

A strong advocate of verse, Elliott regretted the prohibitive cost of producing “beautiful books of poetry” that rarely sold well. When Macmillan could not commit to publication, Gould, like most published poets of her day, most notably Dorothy Livesay whose first volumes, *Green Pitcher* (1928) and *Signpost* (1932), were published by Macmillan at her own expense, agreed to cover the cost of producing her first book. All authors, particularly those who subsidized the

50 Mona Gould to Ellen Elliott, Nov. 1943, MCC fonds.
52 Elliott to Gould, 1 Mar. 1946, MCC fonds.
design and production of their own titles, appreciated the meticulous care Macmillan gave its books. As Gould attested, when she received her copies of *Tasting the Earth*, “I’m quite sure that it will be no fault of my publishers, if the [beautiful] book doesn’t sell!”

Elliott was willing to take a risk on P.K. Page, however, a writer she regarded as a “find.” Following a first rejection by Alfred Knopf, Page submitted *The Sun and the Moon* to Macmillan. Elliott assessed the manuscript as a serious, aesthetic work, “much too good to be true,” and determined to publish Page’s novel. Since she knew, however, that Macmillan Canada would need to share the cost of producing so unusual a novel by a first-time author, Elliott sent Page’s manuscript to the Macmillan Company in New York for its consideration. Although Macmillan New York did not accept the work – war constraints influenced the negative decision – the rejection letter corroborated Elliott’s enthusiasm for the novel and her estimation of Page as a “promising author.”

Undaunted, Elliott offered Page’s manuscript to New York’s Creative Age Press, established by renowned medium Eileen J. Garrett – Garrett also founded the Parapsychology Foundation – which agreed, after some deliberation, to offset the cost of producing *The Sun and the Moon* by purchasing 1,000 copies from Macmillan Canada. Elliott’s efforts and belief in the young writer’s work paid off. She successfully launched Page’s career with a “thoughtful intuitive” novel that might otherwise have gone unpublished.

Although Page received a royalty payment of just three cents per copy on American sales of her book, she accepted Elliott’s advice that “the most important thing for you is to secure publication in the United States, and if it means accepting a reduced royalty you would be well advised to do so.” A young, inexperienced author, Page had “no one to consult about this who knows any more about it than I do” and appreciated her editor’s sincere counsel; as Page recalled in a 2006 interview, Elliott was “sure of herself.” Moreover, when she learned that she would receive a royalty payment of 10% of

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53 Mona Gould to Robert Graves, [Apr. 1943], MCC fonds.
54 Elliott to James Putnam, 20 May 1942, MCC fonds.
55 Putnam to Elliott, 6 July 1942, MCC fonds.
56 Elliott to Putnam, 20 May 1942, MCC fonds.
57 Elliott to Page, 30 Aug. 1943, MCC fonds.
58 Page to Ellen Elliott, 8 Sept. 1943, MCC fonds.
the Canadian list price of $2.25, Page trusted that Elliott was working on her behalf.

In fact, Elliott was a dedicated editor who eased Page’s transition from the private realm of writing to publication. First, although she heralded *The Sun and the Moon* as a success, Elliott accepted Page’s decision to publish her first book under the pseudonym Judith Cape, a device that distanced the author from potential criticism. Second, by co-publishing the novel with Creative Age Press, Elliott ensured Page a presence in the United States, invaluable publicity for a first-time Canadian writer. Finally, when five film companies requested copies of *The Sun and the Moon*, Elliott tried unsuccessfully to negotiate film rights to the novel in several attempts to boost Page’s “teetering bank account” that had been reduced to a “cipher.”60 Elliott’s efforts on behalf of Page were characteristic of her treatment of authors in general. A consummate publisher, she guided writers through the publication process with care. Between 1940 and 1946, for example, four of her Macmillan authors won Governor General’s literary awards.61 Her dynamic personality was ever on view, and she was as enthusiastic and generous as she was conscientious.

It appears, though, that Elliott’s enthusiasm soon became a liability. In April 1946, Lovat Dickson paid a much-publicized visit to Toronto. Dickson’s visit was hailed by the press as evidence that British publishers were “interested in this country and the future of British book sales here.... [They] recognize the great potentialities of the Canadian market ... [and] the British public is interested in Canadian books.”62 The reasons for Dickson’s visit were likely much less benign.

Under the guise of a friendly visit from a representative of the parent company in London, Dickson undertook an evaluation of Macmillan Canada. He spoke to Macmillan employees, including Huckvale and Elliott, and met members of the book trade, such as publishers Frank Appleton and Lorne Pierce, and *Globe and Mail* literary editor William Arthur Deacon. It was, however, Dickson’s private dinner at the King Edward Hotel with John Gray and Frank Upjohn that determined the future of the Canadian branch.

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60 Page to Elliott, [17 Oct. 1944], MCC fonds.
61 They were E.J. Pratt, *Brébeuf and His Brethren* (1940); Ringuet, *Thirty Acres* (1940); Ross Munro, *Gauntlet to Overlord* (1945); and Frederick Philip Grove, *In Search of Myself* (1946).
In his memoir *Fun Tomorrow*, John Gray describes that dinner as momentous. He and Upjohn expressed dissatisfaction with potentially "stormy" working conditions under Huckvale – an ineffective "captain" – and Elliott – "a first mate who didn’t know anything, or care much, about navigation" of Macmillan. Dickson’s unequivocal reply, "This is exactly the kind of thing I came to find out," shows the degree of trust he placed in Gray and Upjohn and a willingness to dismiss the joint achievement of Huckvale and Elliott’s successful management of Macmillan for six years. The ease with which Dickson accepted the account of two colleagues recently returned to publishing after an extended absence overseas during the war revealed a desire to replace the current directors. Dickson’s long-standing affinity with Gray – they developed a close friendship during Gray’s years in Macmillan’s education department – and the fact that as early as January 1946 he wrote not to Elliott but directly to Gray, prior to his return to the office, suggest that London envisaged Gray as general manager of Macmillan Canada. The replacement of Huckvale by Gray soon after Dickson’s Toronto visit and the subsequent departure of Elliott from Macmillan further corroborate the likelihood that Gray had been designated general manager long before his actual appointment.

Elliott may not have suspected that her position as director of Macmillan was tenuous. She carried out her duties with aplomb and efficiency. Her regular communications with the parent company reflected her commitment to Macmillan and her dedicated work as publisher. Throughout the war, Elliott wrote friendly letters to her colleague John Gray in Europe, keeping him abreast of developments at the office, and she regularly sent him parcels of books. His own letters of appreciation were addressed to “my dear Ellen.” Moreover, Elliott was led to believe that London valued her contribution to Macmillan. As she wrote to Dickson, “Your visit to Toronto has meant a great deal to all of us here, and I hope when the plane rose this morning with you and all your excess baggage that you felt happy and satisfied about your Toronto visit.” If Elliott anticipated the changes soon to take place at Macmillan Canada, she would not have written so gracious a note.

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63 Gray 344.
64 Gray 344.
65 Elliott to Dickson, 5 Apr. 1946, MCC fonds.
Elliott’s departure from Macmillan on 1 July 1947, less immediate than Huckvale’s in June 1946, was precipitated by a series of circumstances. First, in April 1946, at the age of 45, she underwent an emergency operation for the removal of “a 6 lb. fibroid & a cyst the size of a baseball,” when her mother suspected she “was carrying the Elephant’s child.” The surgery, Elliott admitted, “took far more out of me than the mere weight removed” and left her “quite exhausted.” She recuperated over the summer at a relative’s home in Shelburne, Ontario, and returned to the office gradually. During Elliott’s convalescence, Gray was placed in charge of publishing. By October 1946, she had resumed full-time work, but stress from overwork may have spurred Elliott to leave Macmillan. In April 1947, for example, she required “nembutol capsules” to fall asleep.

Daniel Macmillan’s 1940 decision to place Elliott in charge of publishing had been largely pragmatic, driven by Hugh Eayrs’s untimely death and the lack of trained male personnel due to the war. Elliott had already proven herself a dedicated employee and a capable editor, eminently suited to continue Eayrs’s work as publisher. In 1946, however, when the ambitious John Gray returned to Macmillan from overseas, he may have felt cramped by Elliott’s semior position.

In all probability, Elliott’s departure was orchestrated by the parent company in London and justified by the desire to place Gray at the helm of Macmillan Canada. Gray was preferable to Elliott for two key reasons. First, although Daniel Macmillan and Lovat Dickson recognized Elliott as an excellent editor and publisher, the culture of publishing in Canada – with the exception of the war years – favoured men over women. In fact, Gray was groomed for the position of general manager, having worked closely under second president Hugh Eayrs, who had been admired by the London directors as an astute publisher. Second, Elliott’s championing of esoteric writers, in particular Frederick Philip Grove, confirmed Dickson’s suspicion that during the years 1940 to 1946, when the company’s financial situation was precarious as a result of war conditions, she paid inadequate attention to the marketability of Macmillan authors.

67 Elliott to Elizabeth Harrison, 10 July 1946, MCC fonds.
68 Elliott to Catherine Grove, 30 Nov. 1946, MCC fonds.
69 Elliott to Hamilton, 14 Apr. 1947, MCC fonds.
That Ellen Elliott held a central place in Canadian publishing was confirmed in the press at the time of her resignation. As William Arthur Deacon noted sadly on 28 June 1947:

The book publishing business in Canada forms a relatively small and exceptionally compact community within Toronto. No outstanding figure can leave it without being acutely missed. Miss Elliott’s many friends throughout Canada will be sorry to see the breaking of an old connection. Her departure also removes from publishing one of the very few persons who have been intimately associated with the development of Canadian literature during the past quarter century.70

At an in-house dinner on 27 June 1947, Macmillan staff expressed regret that Elliott was leaving and “showered her with gifts”71 of appreciation. Among those gifts were the desk, chair, and lamp she had used in her office.

Two pieces of telling evidence suggest Elliott’s departure from Macmillan was less than voluntary. First, Deacon’s farewell notice confirmed she resigned with “no immediate plans” for the future (lo). More significant, however, in her letter to John Gray thanking him for the “grand party” given in her honour, Elliott wrote cryptically:

I hope what I said to the boys and girls has made them feel better about everything. That is what it was calculated to do. They are my friends, and no matter what I think about the manner of my going, I have no wish to unsettle them. I wish you the best of luck, and good health. Thank you for the more than lovely send-off you gave me. It was not easy for you.72

At the moment of departing Macmillan, after nearly three decades, Elliott’s diplomacy was obvious. However, unlike Huckvale (he, too, served Macmillan for twenty-seven years), who received an annual pension of $3,000, plus $10,000 compensation (equivalent to one year’s salary), Elliott was not offered a pension and received $5,000 compensation (equivalent to one year’s salary). Independent and highly intelligent, she had successfully managed Macmillan during especially difficult years, providing strong leadership in the face of inadequate resources, economic instability, and national unrest.

72 Elliott to Gray, 6 July 1947, MCC fonds.
Two years after resigning from Macmillan, Elliott began a highly successful second career as entrepreneur. Together with George McKanday, she established Mailit, an advertising, printing, and mailing company, at 54 Wellington Street West in Toronto. Elliott brought the same enthusiasm and wide-ranging abilities to business that were in evidence while she was “the very capable Skipper” of “the good ship Macmillans.”73 As I have shown, Elliott was an accomplished woman, not solely for her achievements as secretary and director of Macmillan Canada during the 1940s, but also for her resilience, both professional and personal. Ellen Elliott and George McKanday sold their business in October 1972 and entered retirement shortly before Elliott died of a heart attack on 22 March 1973, at the age of 72.

SOMMAIRE

Secrétaire et directrice de la Macmillan Company of Canada entre 1937 et 1947, Ellen Elliot contribua à promouvoir le rôle de l’éditeur de livres au Canada durant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Pendant les années de guerre, Elliot travailla sous la présidence de Robert Huckvale, un comptable qualifié, mais comme ce dernier n’était pas cependant un leader convaincant dans le domaine du livre, Elliot dut mener à bien les tâches reliées à l’ édition. À une époque où les éditeurs locaux se débattaient avec des ressources limitées et ce, dans un contexte économique instable et d’agitation politique, Elliot travailla sans relâche à maintenir la compagnie et à se constituer un catalogue d’auteurs. Figurant parmi les premières femmes à détenir un poste supérieur dans le domaine de l’édition au Canada, Ellen Elliot contribua à assurer la croissance de la firme Macmillan, de simple succursale qu’elle était à ses débuts pour devenir une maison d’édition ayant atteint son plein développement grâce à l’étroite collaboration qu’elle entretint avec des écrivains comme Frederick Philip Grove, W.O. Mitchell, Mona Gould et P.K. Page pour ne citer que ceux-ci. Après la guerre, en 1946, John Morgan Gray fut nommé directeur général, ce qui força Elliot à abandonner son poste à la Macmillan. Cet article aborde pour la première fois le rôle significatif que joua Ellen Elliot à titre de secrétaire et de directrice de la firme Macmillan Canada durant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale ainsi que son travail accompli comme éditrice, lequel permit à l’écriture de projeter un reflet de la diversité géographique et culturel du pays.

73 Lawrence Burpee to Ellen Elliott, 27 Feb. 1942, MCC fonds.